

# The Romance of Lincoln's Life

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First of the Series  
of Romances of  
Famous Americans

The True and Absorbing  
Story of Lincoln's  
Three Love-Affairs



THE slow passing of the years the human mind attains what is called "the historical perspective," but it is still a mooted question as to how many years are necessary. Since Lincoln, nine Presidents have been placed in the White House by the sovereign will of the people; still we think of that one who, save the first, was greatest as a statesman and a soldier rather than a man.

It is difficult to imagine Lincoln as a lover. He was at the helm of the "ship of state" in the most fearful storm it has yet passed through; he struck off the shackles of a fettered people, and was crowned with martyrdom, yet in spite of his greatness he loved like other men.

There is no record of the boyish love which comes to most men in their school-days. The great passion of his life came full-blown in his young manhood, with no whit of its sweetness gone.

Sweet Anne Rutledge! There are those who remember her well, and to this day, in speaking of her, their eyes fill with tears. A lady who knew her says, "Miss Rutledge had auburn hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion. She was pretty, rather slender, and in everything a good-hearted young woman, beloved by all who knew her."

Before Lincoln loved her, she had a sad experience with another man. About the time that he came to New Salem a young man drifted from the Eastern states—John McNeil. He worked hard, was plucky and industrious, and soon accumulated a little property. He met Anne Rutledge when she was but seventeen and still in school, and began to pay her special attentions, which at last culminated in their engagement.

He was about to go back to New York for a visit, and before leaving he told Anne that his name was not McNeil but McNamur—that he had changed his name so that his dependent family might not follow him and settle down upon him before he was able to support them. Now, since he was in a position to aid his parents, brothers and sisters, he was going back to do it, and upon his return he would make Anne his wife.

For a long time she did not hear from him at all, and gossip was rife in New Salem. His letters became more formal and less frequent, and finally ceased altogether. The girl's proud spirit compelled her to hold her head high amid the impertinent questions of her neighbors.

Lincoln had heard of this young man's strange conduct, and concluded that there was now no tie between Miss Rutledge and her quondam lover. He began the siege in earnest, and at last she consented to marry him, provided he gave her time to write to McNamur and obtain release from the pledge which she felt was still binding upon her.

She wrote—but there was no answer. At last, stung by pride and with her heart almost breaking, she definitely accepted Lincoln. It was necessary for him to complete his law studies, and after that he said, "Nothing on God's footstool shall keep us apart."

He worked happily, but a sore conflict raged in Anne's tender heart. Love and pride, doubt, despair, fear and all the legions of darkness strove upon the battle-field of her soul. Finally the strain told upon her delicate health, and she took to her bed with a fever.

The summer waned, and Anne's life ebbed with it. At the very end of her sickness, when all visitors were forbidden, she insisted upon seeing Lincoln. He went to her—and closed the door between them and the world. It was his last hour with her. When he came out his face was white with the agony of parting.

A few days later she died, and he was almost insane with grief. He walked for hours in the woods, refused to eat, would speak to no one, and there settled upon him that profound melancholy which came back time and time again during the after-years.

To one friend he said, "I cannot bear to think that the rain and snow and storms will beat upon my grave." When the days were dark and stormy he was constantly watched, as his friends feared that he might take his own life. Finally they persuaded him to go away, to the house of a friend a few miles out of town, and here he remained until he was ready to face the world once more.



THE  
BEST  
PORTRAIT  
OF THE  
LINCOLN FAMILY

BY  
COURTESY  
OF THE  
LINCOLN  
MUSEUM, WASHINGTON

A few weeks after Anne's burial McNamur returned to New Salem. On his arrival he met Lincoln in the post-office, and both were sorely distressed. He made no explanation of his absence, and shortly forgot about Miss Rutledge, but her grave was in Lincoln's heart until the bullet of the assassin struck him down.

In October of 1833 Lincoln met Miss Mary Owens, and admired her, though not extravagantly. From all accounts she was an unusual woman. She was tall, full in figure, had blue eyes, dark hair and was well educated. She returned to New Salem in 1836, and Lincoln at once began to call upon her, enjoying her wit and beauty. At that time she was about twenty-eight years old.

One day Miss Owens and another woman were ascending a steep hill, on the way to a friend's house, when Lincoln joined them. He walked behind with Miss Owens, and talked with her, quite oblivious of the fact that her friend was carrying a very cross and heavy baby. When they reached the summit Miss Owens said, laughingly, "You would not make a good husband, Abe."

They sat on the fence, and "had it out" with each other. Both were angry when they parted, and the breach was not healed for some time. It was poor policy to quarrel, since some time before he had proposed to Miss Owens, and she had asked for a period in which to consider it before giving a final answer.

His letters to her are not what one would call "love-letters." One begins in this way:

MARY—I have been sick ever since my arrival, or I should have written sooner. It is but little difference, however, as I have very little even yet to write. And more, the longer I can avoid the mortification of looking in the post-office for your letter, and not finding it, the better. You see I am mad about that old letter yet. I don't like very well to risk you again. I'll try you once more, anyhow.

The remainder of the letter deals with political matters, and is signed simply "Your friend, Lincoln." In another letter to her, written the following year, he says:

I am often thinking about what we said of your coming to live at Springfield. I am afraid you would not be satisfied. There is a great deal of flourishing about in carriages here, which it would cost your doom to see without sharing it. You would have to be poor, without the means of hiding your poverty. Do you believe you could bear that patiently?

Whatever woman may cast her lot with mine, should any ever do so, it is my intention to do all in my power to make her happy and contented; and there is nothing I can imagine that would make me more unhappy than to fail in the effort.

I know I should be much happier with you than the way I am, provided I saw no signs of discontent in you. What you have said to me may have been in the way of jest, or I may have misunderstood it. If so, then let it be forgotten; if otherwise, I much wish you would think seriously before you decide. For my part, I have already decided. What I have said I

will most positively abide by, provided you wish it. My opinion is that you had better not do it. You have not been accustomed to hardship, and it may be more severe than you now imagine. I know you are capable of thinking correctly upon any subject, and if you deliberate maturely upon this before you decide, then I am willing to abide your decision.

Matters went on in this way for about three months; then they met again, seemingly without making any progress. On the day they parted Lincoln wrote her another letter, evidently to make his own position clear and put the burden of decision on her.

"If you feel yourself in any degree bound to me," he said, "I am now willing to release you, provided you wish it; while, on the other hand, I am willing, and even anxious, to bind you faster if I can be convinced that it will, in any considerable degree, add to your happiness. This, indeed, is the whole question with me. Nothing would make me more miserable than to believe you miserable—nothing more happy than to know you were so."

In spite of his evident sincerity, it is not surprising to learn that a little later Miss Owens definitely and finally refused him. In April of the following year Lincoln wrote to his friend Mrs. L. H. Browning, giving a full account of this grotesque courtship.

"I finally was forced to give it up," he wrote, "at which I very unexpectedly arrived. I was mortified, it seemed to me, in a hundred different ways. My vanity was deeply wounded by the reflection that I had so long been too stupid to discover her intentions, and at the same time never doubting that I understood them perfectly, and also that she, whom I had taught myself to believe nobody else would have, had actually rejected me, with all my fancied greatness."

"And to cap the whole, I then, for the first time, began to suspect that I was really a little in love with her. But let it all go. I'll try and outlive it. Others have been made fools of by the girls; but this can never with truth be said of me. I most emphatically in this instance made a fool of myself. I have now come to the conclusion never again to think of marrying, and for this reason I can never be satisfied with any one who would be blockhead enough to have me."

The gist of the matter seems to be that at heart Lincoln hesitated at matrimony, as other men have done both before and since his time. In the letter to Mrs. Browning he speaks of his efforts to "procrastinate the evil day for a time, which I really dreaded as much, perhaps more, than an Irishman does the halter."

But in 1839 Miss Mary Todd came to live with her sister, Mrs. Minnie W. Edwards, at Springfield. She was in her twenty-first year, and is described as of average height and of remarkably fine, and a well-rounded face, rich dark brown hair and bluish-gray eyes. No picture of her fails to show the full, well-developed chin, which more than any other feature is an evidence of determination. She was strong, proud, passionate, gifted with a keen sense of the ridiculous, well educated, hot-tempered, and swayed only by her own imperious will.

Lincoln was attracted at once, and strangely enough, Stephen A. Douglas crossed his wooing. For a time the two men were rivals, the pursuit waxing more furious day by day. One one asked Miss Todd which of them she intended to marry, and she answered, laughingly, "The one who has the best chance of becoming President."

She is said to have refused the "Little Giant" on account of his lax morality, and after that the coast was clear for Lincoln. Miss Todd's sister tells us that he was "charmed with Mary's wit and fascinated with her quick sagacity, her will, her nature and culture."

"I have happened in the room," she says, "where they were sitting, often and often, and Mary led the conversation. Lincoln would listen, and gaze on her as if drawn by some superior power—invisibly so, he listened, but scarcely ever said a word."

The affair naturally culminated in a definite engagement, and the course of love was running smoothly, when a distracting element appeared in the shape of Miss Matilda Edwards—the sister of

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